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August 12, 2010

The Honorable Ray LaHood

Secretary, United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing on behalf of the Parks & People Foundation (Parks & People) to urge your support for the City of Baltimore's TIGER II grant application for the Westport Waterfront Transit-Oriented Development (Westport Waterfront TOD). The Westport Waterfront TOD will provide multi-modal transportation infrastructure, including light rail, highway, pedestrian, bike and road, to support the development of 13,000 new jobs and 2,000 housing units and the rehabilitation of a 50 acre brownfield in a severely distressed area of Baltimore.

Parks & People works to improve the quality of life in Baltimore by focusing on the physical, social and environmental fabric of urban neighborhoods: an approach that is gaining increased attention and momentum both nationally and here in Baltimore. Parks & People works to revitalize neighborhoods through hands-on community greening activities, forming networks among communities to sustain natural resources, and providing programs for children where they can learn, grow, explore their natural environment and develop a sense of community and environmental stewardship.

Over the last six years, Parks & People has leveraged significant federal, state and local resources to revitalize the 930-acre Gwynns Falls Watershed on the west side of Baltimore as part of a nationally replicable model of watershed restoration and community revitalization. Called Watershed 263, this public/private partnership aims to heal decades of environmental degradation through community stewardship, urban greening and stormwater quality interventions.

Parks & People is currently working with Westport Development to replicate this approach in the Westport neighborhood at the foot of the Gwynns Falls. Already 200 trees have been planted and a 5-person clean team is working to clean and green the surrounding neighborhood as part of an ARRA funded workforce development initiative. Parks & People has also been a lead agency in advocating for the construction, maintenance and promotion of the 15-mile Gwynns Falls Trail which connects the Westport TOD to more than 30 urban neighborhoods.

As a key partner in the Westport Waterfront TOD, we believe the Westport TOD meets the TIGER II sustainability and livability criteria by:

- Integrating and expanding the 15-mile Gwynns Falls shared use trail as part of a larger multi-modal network
- Comprehensively addressing stormwater management and habitat restoration within the development as part of the larger restoration of the Middle Branch estuary, part of the Patapsco River
- Partnering with Parks & People and others to restore the natural environment in the surrounding distressed community and provide green workforce development opportunities.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Westport Waterfront TOD and urge you to consider funding the transportation improvements necessary to catalyze the Westport Waterfront TOD and create a national model for sustainable development and community revitalization. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline M. Carrera
President and CEO

